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INVESTIGATION | ANIMAL CRUELTY

Breeders accused of using live rabbits to train greyhounds

By **MATT DEGROOD**
The Daily News

» **LA MARQUE**

Investigators for an advocacy group say they have documented evidence breeders in several states, including Texas, used a brutal, illegal method to train greyhounds to race. That includes several dogs that competed at the now-shuttered Gulf Greyhound Park in La Marque.

Leaders at GREY2K USA Worldwide, a Massachusetts-based lobbying group, have turned over videos and a written complaint to Texas law enforcement asserting an Elgin-based farm used live-lure training to prepare greyhounds for racing, said Carey Theil, executive director of the group.

The Daily News is not naming the farm because, as of deadline Monday, no one had been criminally charged in connection with the investigation.

Live-lure training is the practice of using small animals, such as rabbits, to train greyhounds to follow a lure during a race.

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GREY2K USA WORLDWIDE



Over the last weeks, my organization gathered video evidence of live lure training in Elgin, Texas. "Live lure training" refers to the use of small animals, commonly rabbits, to excite and enhance a chase instinct in young greyhounds. Screaming animals are dangled before greyhounds, dragged in front of them on ropes, or simple set loose to be attacked. These fragile animals often suffer cruel and miserable deaths. Our investigation identified the use of dozens of greyhounds to maul rabbits over two days in June and July. These activities took place at a farm which breeds and trains dogs for use in racing all across the country.

Historical Background

Live lure training also known as "jacking" involves the use of small animals to enhance a prey drive in greyhounds. Young dogs are encouraged to chase, maul and in some cases, tear apart rabbits and other defenseless animals. This may occur on small training tracks or in enclosed coursing fields. "Bleeding" or "baiting" has been discovered around the world, most recently in a 2015 Australian exposé that led to a temporary prohibition on dog racing in New South Wales.¹

Excerpt from a letter written by GREY2K USA Worldwide and sent to John F. Bash, U.S. Attorney Western District of Texas, and Ken Paxton, Texas Attorney General

COMING SOON



What pressures are social service organizations experiencing as the COVID-19 pandemic lingers?

CORONAVIRUS | EVENTS

Two County fall festivals canceled due to COVID-19

By **KERI HEATH**
The Daily News

» **GALVESTON**

More Galveston County fall festivals have joined the growing list of COVID-19 cancellations, raising questions about what organizations will do without their vital fundraising events.

The popular Galveston Island Oktoberfest and La Marque Bayou Fest have been canceled as organizers expect coronavirus social distancing

See **FESTIVALS** » A7



ISTOCK/Courtesy



THE DAILY NEWS/File photo Brian Mitchell sips a beer while partaking in the annual Galveston Island Oktoberfest in Galveston on Oct. 26, 2019.

RABBITS

Continued » A1

Greyhounds will chase the rabbit and tear it apart.

At least 12 of the Elgin-trained dogs raced at Gulf Greyhound Park in La Marque, Theil said.

"Across the country, greyhound trainers are torturing small animals in a misguided attempt to fix races," said Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel for the organization. "This cruelty has been hidden from the public for decades and must end."

The Texas Racing Act and rules of racing prohibit the use of live or dead animals to train greyhounds, documents show.

State law and a 2019 federal law also create criminal penalties for the practice, Dorchak said.

Representatives of the Texas Racing Commission, which oversees and regulates greyhound racing in the state, declined to comment about the allegations Monday.

"We're certainly aware of the disturbing allegations, but we don't have any comment at this time," said Robert Elrod, spokesman for the commission.

Officials with the Texas Greyhound Association, a group of breeders and racing enthusiasts that works to improve conditions at tracks and kennels, told The Daily News they opposed live-lure training.

"We absolutely do not condone live-lure training," said Billy Galbreath, president of the group. "We are 100 percent against live lure."

Videos of the training in Texas were captured on June 30 and July 2, Dorchak said. They show dogs apparently chasing after rabbits and attacking them.

Investigators have determined 151 dogs have been raised on the farm since 2017, Dorchak said. Of those, about 87 are owned by people in Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Texas and West Virginia.

Twenty-two greyhounds

In Texas, the torture of animals, and live lure training specifically, are each subject to felony treatment under the state's anti-cruelty law.

V.T.C.A., Penal Code § 42.092(b) Cruelty to Nonlivestock Animals.

(b) A person commits an offense if the person intentionally, knowingly or recklessly:

(1) tortures an animal or in a cruel manner kills or causes serious bodily injury to an animal;



GREY2K USA WORLDWIDE/Courtesy

These four images were taken from a video recorded by an investigator working for the advocacy group GREY2K USA Worldwide. The images purport to show the use of rabbits in what's called live-lure training of greyhounds, which is illegal in Texas. The video was recorded at a dog farm in Elgin, according to GREY2K.



GREY2K USA Worldwide/Courtesy

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GREY2K USA WORLDWIDE/Courtesy

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are actively racing at dog tracks across the country, Dorchak said.

After nearly 30 years, the dog racing track at Gulf Greyhound Park in June

shut down operations for good, officials with the organization announced at the time, citing a decline in interest.

The park's announce-



GREY2K USA WORLDWIDE/Courtesy

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ment came amid a general decline in greyhound racing nationally.

Dog racing in the United States has faced opposition

and other challenges over the past few years.

Florida voters, for instance, shut down greyhound racing in 2018. And

live racing was temporarily halted at Gulf Greyhound Park in 2015 — because of increased competition from casinos, unprofitability and rising costs — but was resumed in December 2017.

Greyhound racing has drawn organized opposition by some animal rights groups, which applauded the end of live racing at Gulf Greyhound Park in 2015. At the time, the park was the last in Texas hosting live dog races on a regular basis.

Gulf Greyhound Park opened its \$55 million facility covering 110 acres to more than 11,000 fans in November 1992.

During the first full year of operation, it set national records for attendance and wagering. The overcrowded parking lot was expanded to accommodate throngs of visitors.

In 2000, gamblers statewide wagered \$63.2 million on live dog races; the amount dwindled to \$6.9 million in 2014, when Gulf Greyhound Park was the only track offering live races.

Officials with GREY2K USA Worldwide also submitted complaints and video of similar investigations in Oklahoma and Kansas, records show.

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